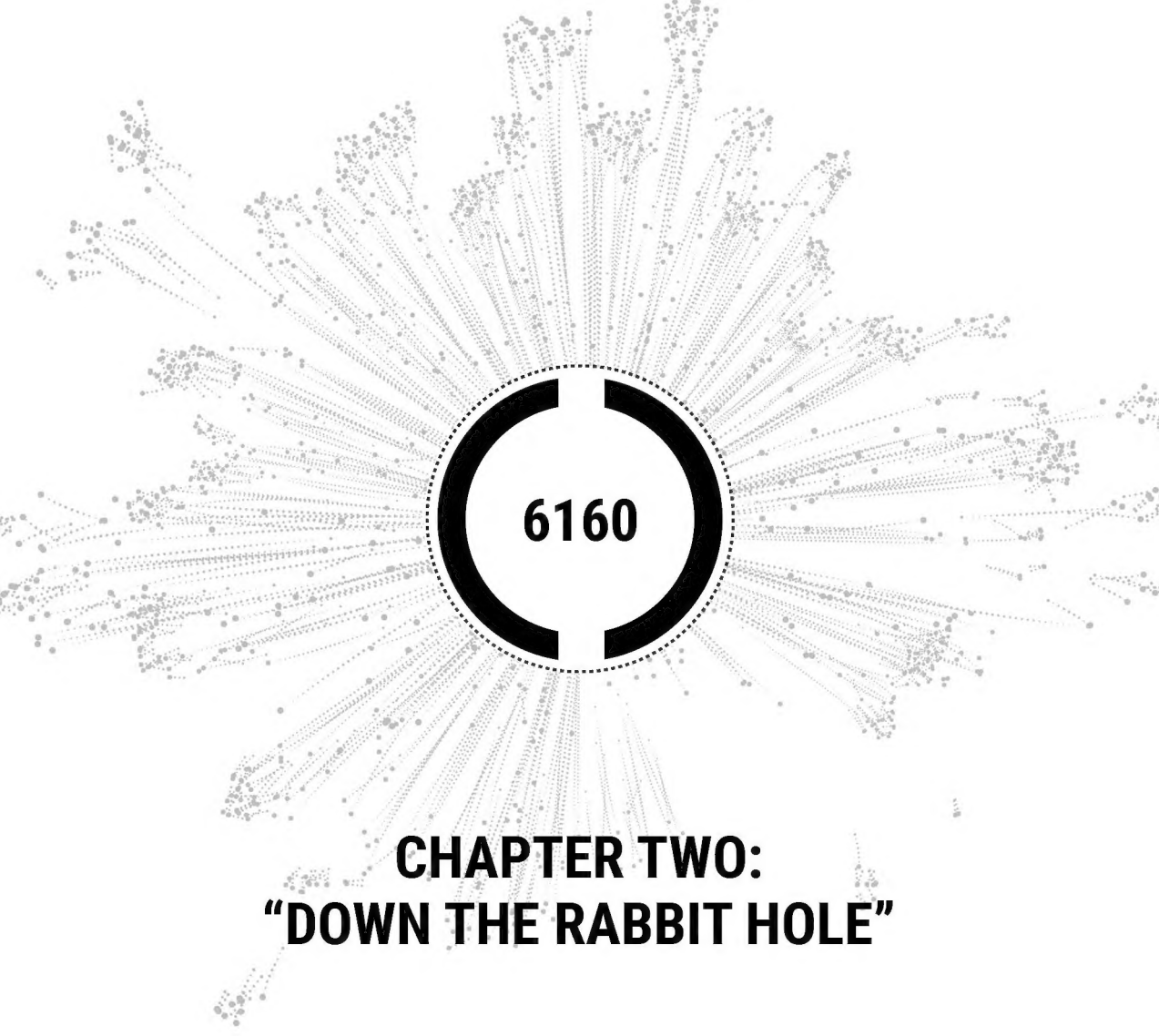
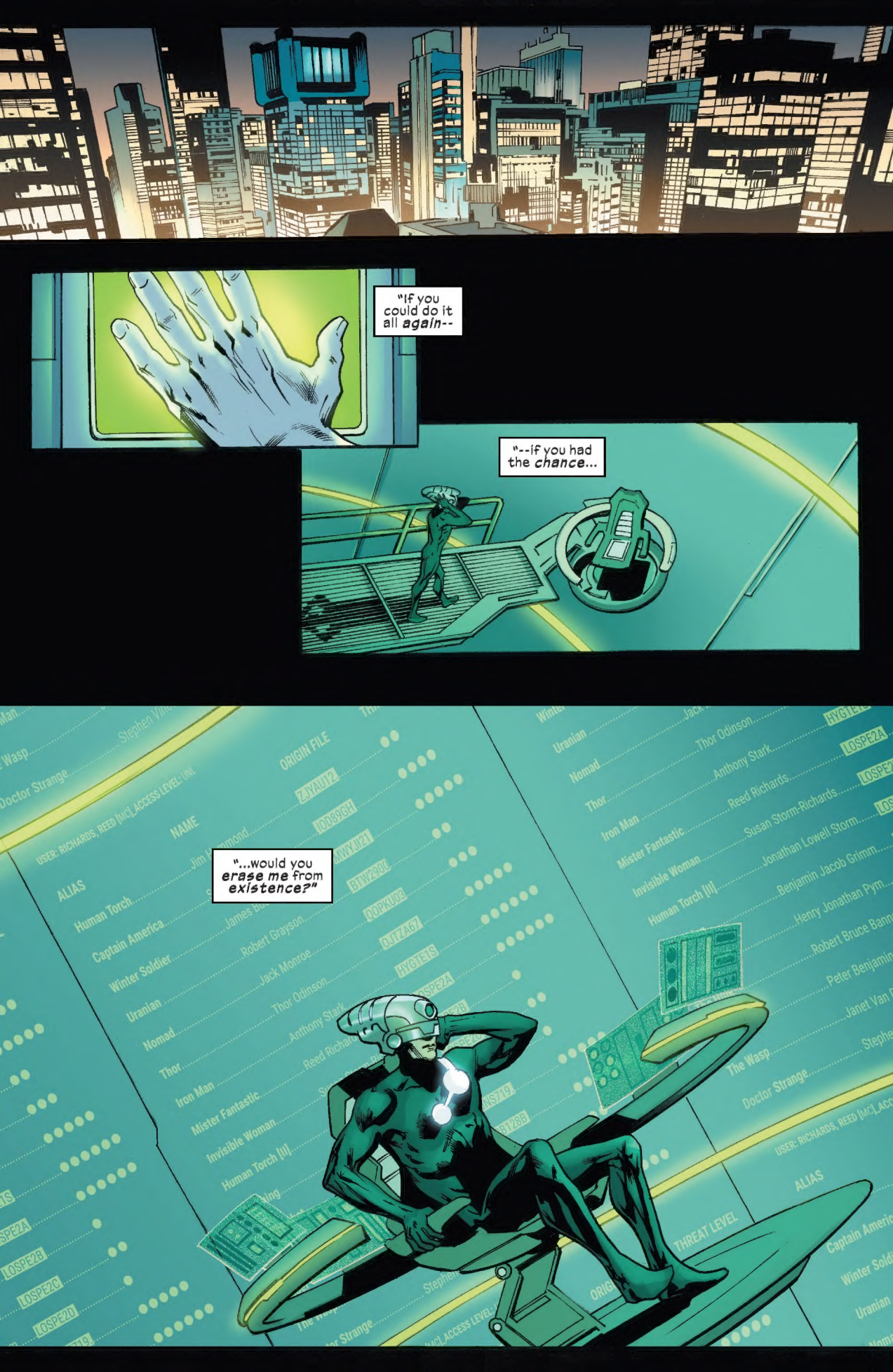
JONATHAN HICKMAN · BRYAN HITCH · ANDREW CURRIE · ALEX SINCLAIR
ULTIMATE
INVASION
MARVEL
2



CHAPTER TWO:
“DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE”


"If you could do it all *again*--
"--if you had the *chance*...
"...would you *erase me* from *existence?*"
USER: RICHARDS, REED [MC]_ACCESS LEVEL: UNC
NAME
ORIGIN FILE
ALIAS
Human Torch
Captain America
Winter Soldier
Uranian
Nomad
Thor
Iron Man
Mister Fantastic
Invisible Woman
Human Torch [II]
The Wasp
Doctor Strange
Thor Odinson
Anthony Stark
Reed Richards
Susan Storm-Richards
Jonathan Lowell Storm
Benjamin Jacob Grimm
Henry Jonathan Pym
Robert Bruce Banner
Peter Benjamin Parker
Janet Van Dyne
Stephen Strange
Jack Monroe
Robert Grayson
James Buchanan Barnes
THREAT LEVEL
LOSPE2A
LOSPE2B
LOSPE2C
LOSPE2D

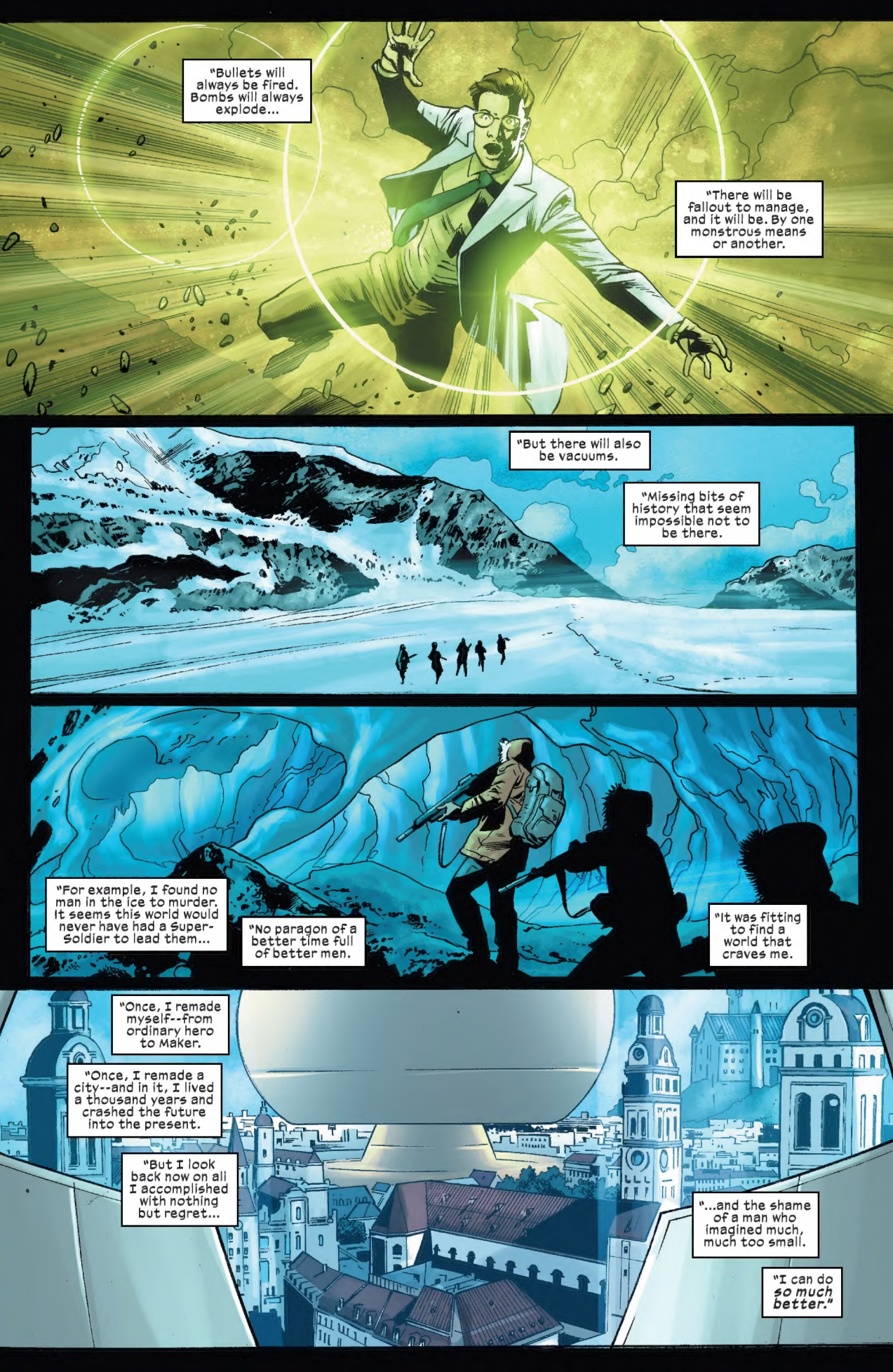
...
...
YES.

I'll keep that in mind.

"And so, what exactly does one do with the full knowledge of their enemies--and the unlimited capacity to engage them--before they even have the faintest idea that you exist?
"It's simple, really. Whatever one wants.

"Of course, there will be differences in another universe. Deviations and branching possibilities...
"A twisted mirror which casts only similar reflections.

"Still, there is an *Asgard*.
"And with it, a son of lightning and thunder to deal with. A king of lies to place on a throne...
"A Bifrost to shatter.
"A rocket launch to delay by hours, and a cosmic storm missed.
"The fantastic reduced to something...*more manageable*.
"However, regardless of my actions, mankind will still be slavish to its nature--*there will still be wars and weapons of wars*...
"...and men who make such things.
STONE STARK


"Bullets will always be fired. Bombs will always explode...
"There will be fallout to manage, and it will be. By one monstrous means or another.
"But there will also be vacuums.
"Missing bits of history that seem impossible not to be there.
"For example, I found no man in the ice to murder. It seems this world would never have had a super-soldier to lead them...
"No paragon of a better time full of better men.
"It was fitting to find a world that craves me.
"Once, I remade myself--from ordinary hero to Maker.
"Once, I remade a city--and in it, I lived a thousand years and crashed the future into the present.
"But I look back now on all I accomplished with nothing but regret...
"...and the shame of a man who imagined much, much too small.
"I can do *so much better.*"

ULTIMATE INVASION

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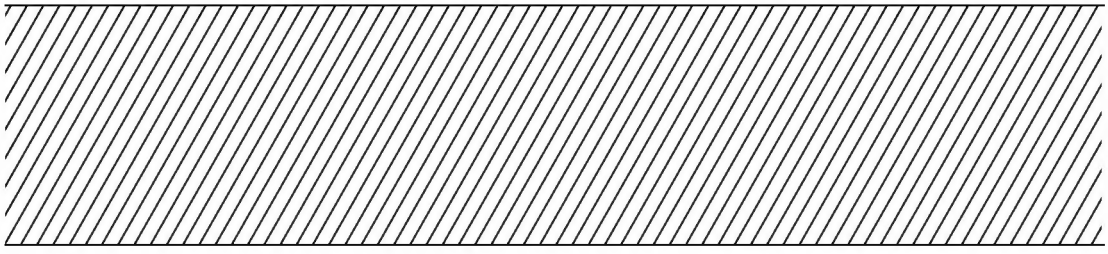
02

MAKER MEMORY LOG

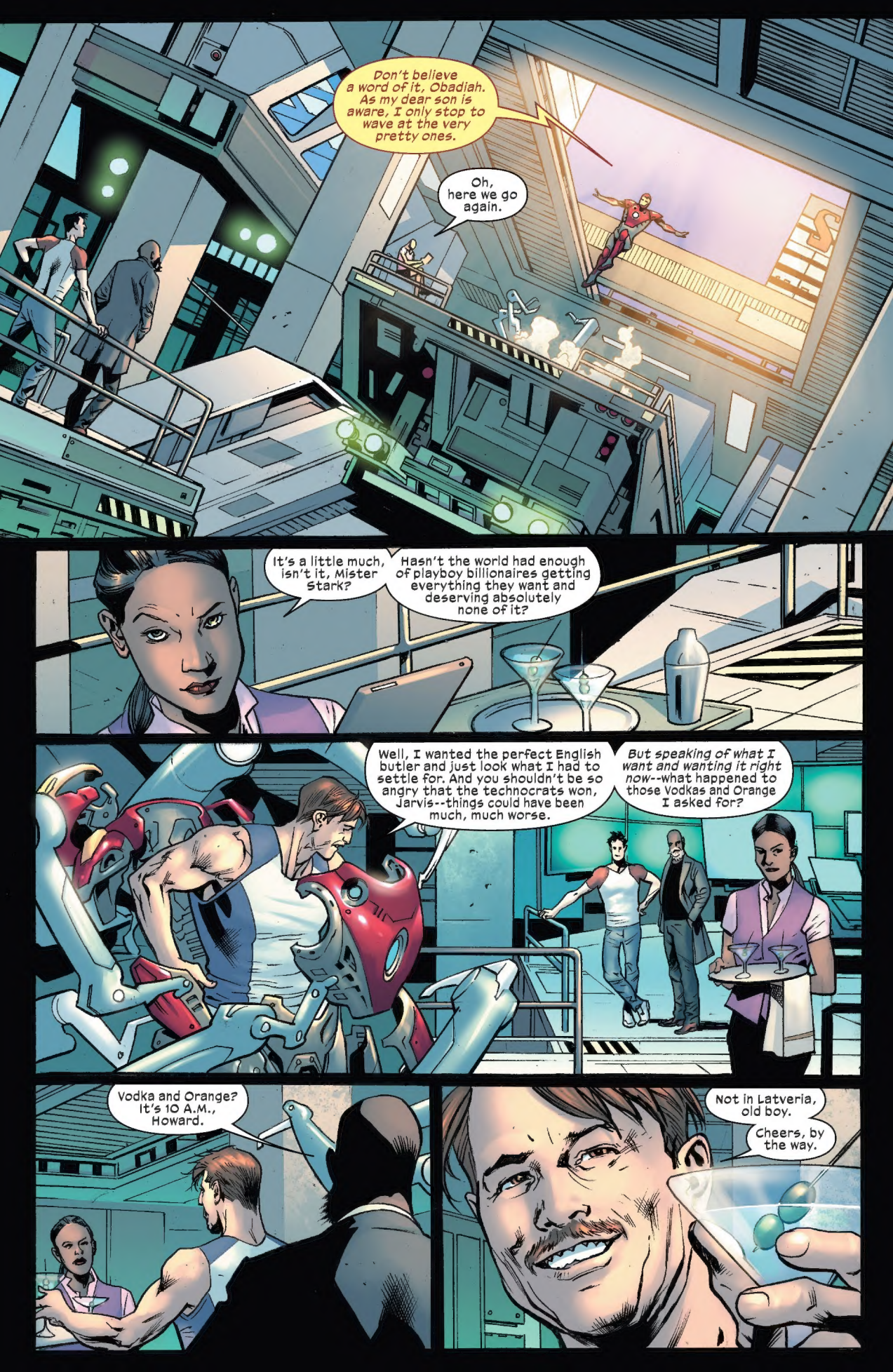
ARCHIVAL DATA [BR_616] ***REVISED***

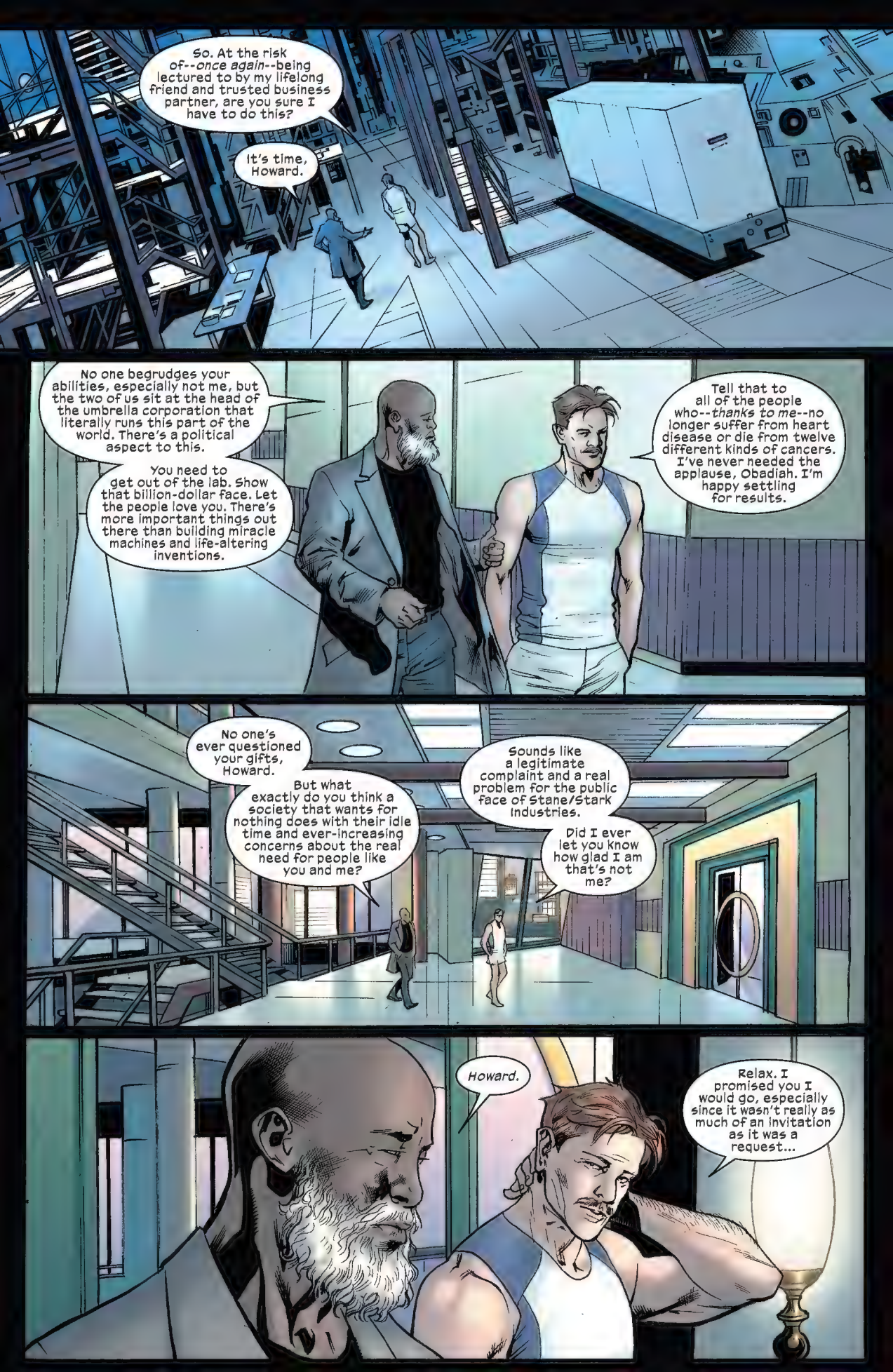


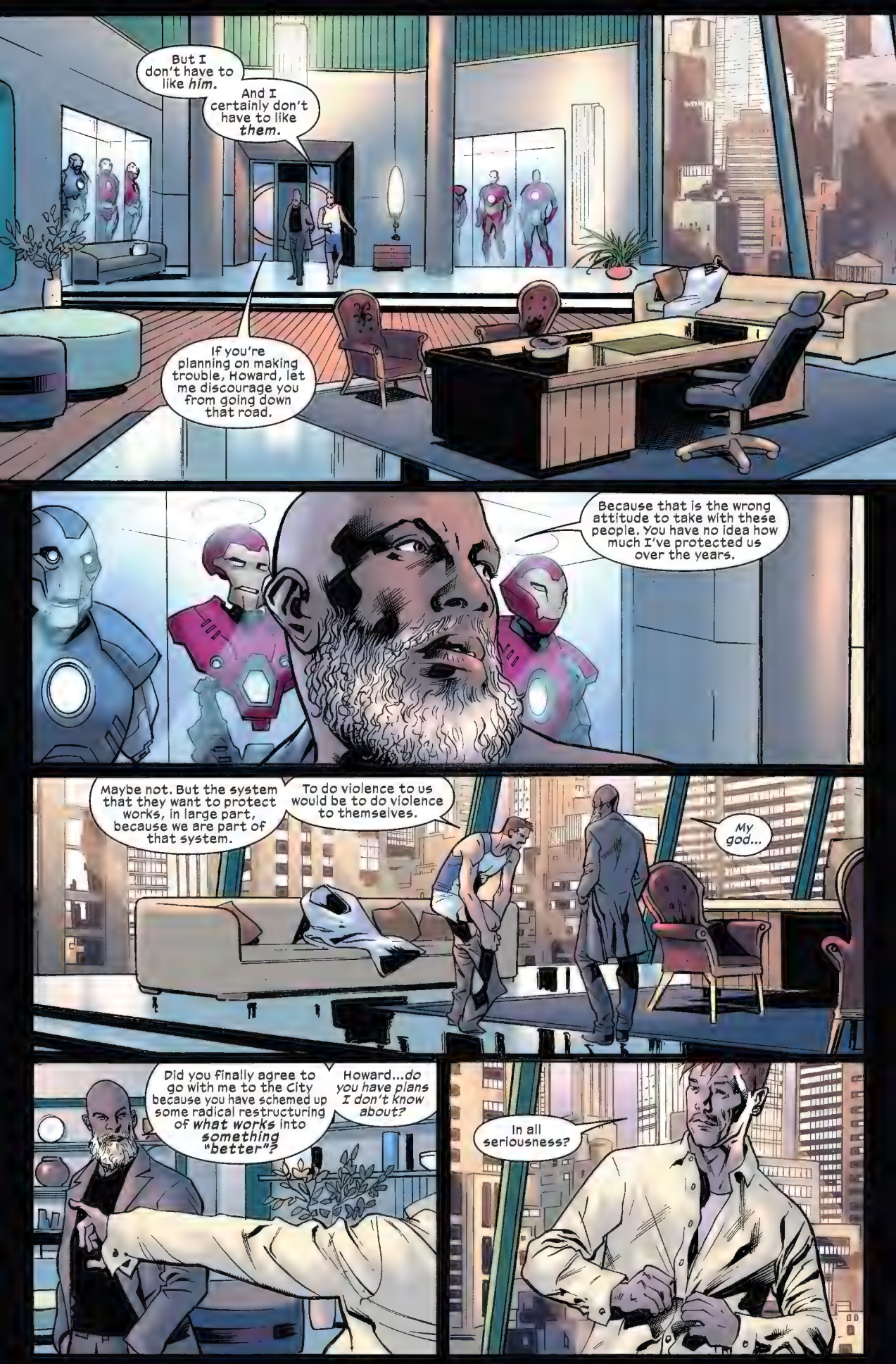
WORLD EXPERIMENT: 6160

NAME	ORIGIN FILE	STATUS	NODE [REPOSITORY]	ARTIFACT
Jim Hammond	ZJYAU12	Deceased	12	Android Brain
Steven Rogers	IOD89GH	Undefined	--	--
James Buchanan Barnes	MWYJI21	Deceased	12	Blood Sample
Robert Grayson	BTW2900	Inactive	08	Quantum Bands
Jack Monroe	QOPKU03	Inactive	02	Blood Sample
Thor Odinson	OJTZA67	Captive	03	Destroyer Seed
Howard Stark	HYGTE1S_var	Controlled	07	Stane/Stark dBase
Reed Richards	LOSPE2A	Controlled	13-18	Dedicated Library
Susan Storm	LOSPE2B	Deceased	13	Blood Sample
Jonathan Lowell Storm	LOSPE2C	Deceased	13	Blood Sample
Benjamin Jacob Grimm	LOSPE2D	Deceased	13	Blood Sample
Henry Jonathan Pym	YJNS719	Inactive	06	Pym Generator
Robert Bruce Banner	UBB128B	Controlled	04	Blood Sample
Peter Benjamin Parker	LLOM223	Inactive	04	Biological Catalyst
Janet Van Dyne	PPLU17X	Inactive	01	Pym Generator
Stephen Vincent Strange	90128BQ	Captive	09	Eye of Agamotto

Manhattan.
Is this *something new?*
Or does he always show off like this when he takes the new suit out for a spin?
Every single time, Mister Stane. Sometimes I don't think Dad considers a test run complete until he's waved at every lady in upper-middle management in the city.


Don't believe a word of it, Obadiah. As my dear son is aware, I only stop to wave at the very pretty ones.
Oh, here we go again.
It's a little much, isn't it, Mister Stark?
Hasn't the world had enough of playboy billionaires getting everything they want and deserving absolutely none of it?
Well, I wanted the perfect English butler and just look what I had to settle for. And you shouldn't be so angry that the technocrats won, Jarvis--things could have been much, much worse.
But speaking of what I want and wanting it right now--what happened to those Vodkas and Orange I asked for?
Vodka and Orange? It's 10 A.M., Howard.
Not in Latveria, old boy.
Cheers, by the way.


So. At the risk of--*once again*--being lectured to by my lifelong friend and trusted business partner, are you sure I have to do this?
It's time, Howard.
No one begrudges your abilities, especially not me, but the two of us sit at the head of the umbrella corporation that literally runs this part of the world. There's a political aspect to this.
You need to get out of the lab. Show that billion-dollar face. Let the people love you. There's more important things out there than building miracle machines and life-altering inventions.
Tell that to all of the people who--*thanks to me*--no longer suffer from heart disease or die from twelve different kinds of cancers. I've never needed the applause, Obadiah. I'm happy settling for results.
No one's ever questioned your gifts, Howard.
But what exactly do you think a society that wants for nothing does with their idle time and ever-increasing concerns about the real need for people like you and me?
Sounds like a legitimate complaint and a real problem for the public face of Stane/Stark Industries.
Did I ever let you know how glad I am that's not me?
Howard.
Relax. I promised you I would go, especially since it wasn't really as much of an invitation as it was a request...


But I don't have to like *him*.
And I certainly don't have to like *them*.
If you're planning on making trouble, Howard, let me discourage you from going down that road.
Because that is the wrong attitude to take with these people. You have no idea how much I've protected us over the years.
Maybe not. But the system that they want to protect works, in large part, because we are part of that system.
To do violence to us would be to do violence to themselves.
My god...
Did you finally agree to go with me to the City because you have schemed up some radical restructuring of ***what works*** into ***something "better"?***
Howard...*do you have plans I don't know about?*
In all seriousness?

Maybe I look out the window and I question what we've done and what we've made. I think of all my gifts--*all my abilities*--and I wonder, is this it? Is the world-as-it-is the sum total of what I am capable of?
I tell you, old friend, I whisper these questions to myself at night and I can no longer accept the answers.
Does that make sense to you?
More than you can imagine.
Well then, we'd best be on our way. Wouldn't want to be late--wouldn't want to disappoint our fellow world leaders. *Pepper?*
The jet is ready and waiting in loft three...
Your flight is scheduled to be four and a half hours. Which should be more than enough time to finish that research paper you're working on, hold the conference call with your engineering team in Alaska, and take your regularly scheduled one-hour power nap.
Thank you, Pepper.
Well, Obadiah, that takes care of my agenda. What's on yours?
Just one thing, Howard...
It's time for you to meet your *Maker.*

Latveria.
...and so, after two weeks of having disappeared without any indication of how long he--and the City itself--would be shielded and in isolation, word has reached us...
...that the doors of the City will be thrown open and the great convergence of incorporated nation-states will occur. To that end, attending the day's events is a who's who of this golden generation...
...and there they are. Obadiah Stane and the mercurial Howard Stark--the finest of American technocrats.
True wizards of innovation who relentlessly force their nation forward...

...it is said that the enlightened children of eternal light shine as brightly as they do because they rest in the shadow of the protective hand of their highest holy man, the legendary and immortal Hulk...
...a testament to the power of serenity and the epitome of those who resist the seductive call of rage and revenge...
...and with the unforeseen consolidation of the three Pacific clans who could lay claim to the seat of power, it was the open Hand of the ascendent Harada-Yoshida alliance that gained supremacy of the...

...only here under the white flag of peace, the Rasputin family needs no introduction.
Infamy and fear precede them. Biology and evolution relentlessly pursue them...
...and that's just the...hold on a second.
I'm getting word now that, yes--as the world watches--the City is beginning to open.

Well...
I'm waiting.

Quickly now--and careful!

Bozhe moi!

Just the Maker and the other acceptable targets.

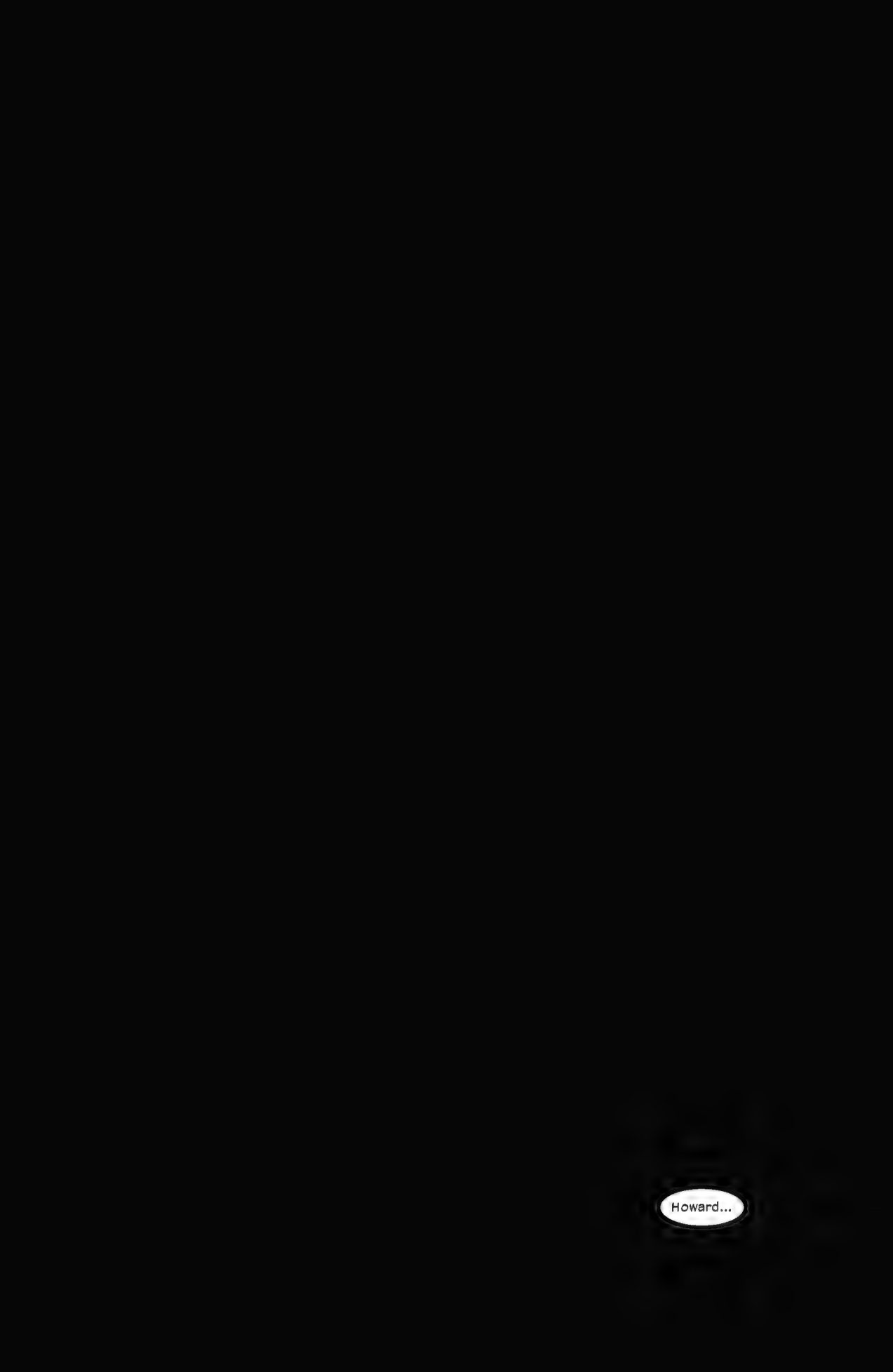
No one else!

Obadiah!
What the hell is--?
No idea. You don't happen to be wearing your portable suit, do you?
You told me not to come armed.
And when, exactly, did you start listening to me?
Fair point. I won't ever make that mistake again.

That's a good idea. As a *general rule*, never listen to someone who doesn't follow their own *advice*.
Get clear of this.
I'll handle it.

AARRGGGHH!

Obadiah!
Dammit. Suit's going critical...
I'm sorry, Howard...
...I'm not going to--


Howard...

Howard, you can wake up now.
Can you hear me?
Wha--?
What's happened?
Terrible news, I'm afraid.
Obadiah Stane is dead.
...
I... I saw it happen.
I wish there was time to grieve...
...but time is something we have very little of at the moment.
Take a look.
What the...?

Who are they?

They are from *the future.* Temporal suicide bombers here to erase me--*and possibly you*--from *history.*

Why?

That's the question, *isn't it?*

Does it make you fear what terrible things you're going to do in your future? Or does it anger you that they tried to rob you of the chance to have one?

Honestly, I'm not sure I've ever bought into the idea of static temporal states.

No? No *cause* and *effect* looping around to eat each other? *No snakes? No tails?*

Want to *find out?*

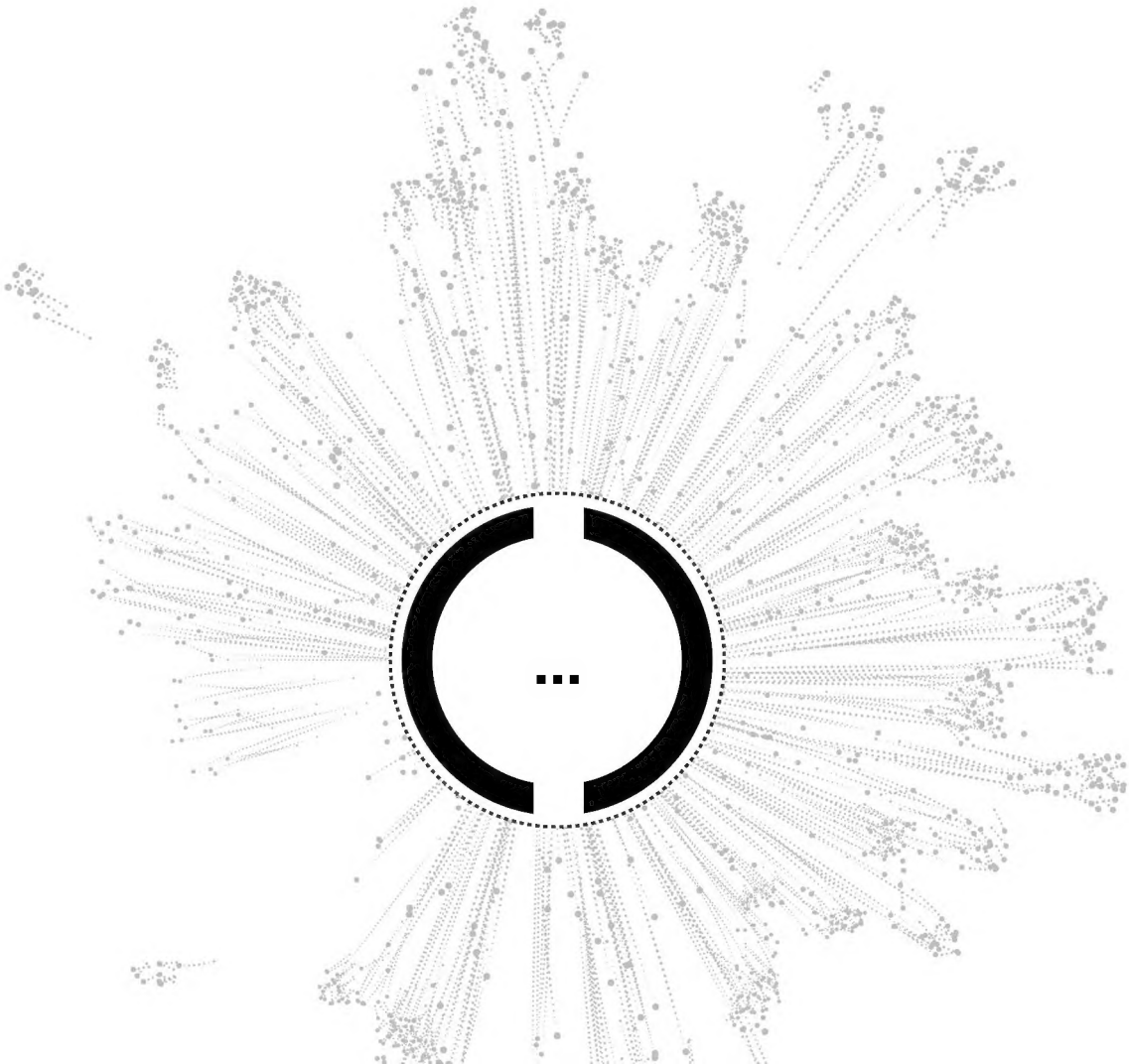
How are you going to--?

Why are we here?
Have we done something wrong?
Is there some reaso--?
Shhhh.
In the City, we've gotten rather good at genetic engineering: cellular legacies, protein archaeology and the recognizing of historical genetic markers.
We did a regressive scan of each of the future soldiers and discovered that almost all of them are identical designer clones--*engineered recombinants*-- of seed DNA.
Then we *tracked it* to the ***source***.
You can't possibly be going to--
How could you?
How c--?
AAIII--

-IIIeEEEEEE-!!
Well. Normally, I loathe the sword instead of the scalpel, but somewhere in the future I just erased an entire army from existence.
I guess we learned a little something there, didn't we?
You idiot...
You know they're going to do the same to you, right?
Find you in your crib. Erase you and what you've done.
That won't work with me.
Why not?
Because I wasn't born here.
Not in this place, on this planet...or even this universe.
I emerged fully formed. If they come for me...it'll have to be at the height of my powers.
They did. And my friend died because of it.
Hmmm. Come with me.
I want to show you something.

This is an *Immortus Engine.*
Variable power source. The transfer coils are unstable molecules.
I can't see why someone would choose to build it that way, unless... oh...
You made a *time machine.*
This is why...this has to be why they came here...
It is *damaged.* Currently *non-functional,* but--
You have to *destroy it.*
Forward and backward, bending wills to my design.
I wouldn't even if I could.
Look around. Do you think this perfectly ordered society you live in is how things were supposed to go?
It wasn't. I promise you.

"I used this machine to remake the world into what it is now.
"Erase threats before they could emerge..."
...and repurpose existing pieces--like you--for grander designs.
It's...it's unconscionable--unbelievable. You have to understand the full scope of what you've done, right?
You annihilated the future--you destroyed their past--this won't be the end of it...
This was just your first encounter.
No. It was the second.
The first was two weeks ago...

Our meeting left quite an... *impression.*
...
How are you not dead?
My body is not like yours. For self-preservation's sake, I chose to separate and redistribute my brain and vital organs long ago.
I will heal and it will take time, but I did suffer *some damage.*
My memory is...*impaired.* ***Flawed*** and ***fractured...***
I can't trust what I remember because I am remembering things... *incorrectly.*
What I do know is that I need you. More than anyone else on ***this world*** and *maybe others.*
Why?

Because, Howard Stark...
...I believe *you* are the one who *built this.*
TO BE CONTINUED...